

# Bill Fromhold

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## CAPITAL LETTER:

A report from  
your Legislature

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**Dear Fellow Citizen:**

**I'm honored to help spotlight our Clark County interests and perspectives in the Washington State Legislature.**

A special legislative session early last month agreed to cancel our state's 2004 presidential primary. The "ugly beauty contest," as one newspaper called the presidential primary, was shaping up to be an irrelevant election. Still, the price tag for Clark and Washington's 38 other counties would have climbed to about \$7 million simply to hold the presidential primary at all!

It doesn't make sense for Washington taxpayers to pay anything — let alone \$7 million — to stage a meaningless presidential primary for the 2004 election. Our legislation calling off the 2004 primary is a one-time deal — Washington state's presidential primary can certainly resume for the 2008 election.

(Our blanket-primary system is different story. A federal court, not the Legislature, has ordered revisions in our blanket primary. **I strongly support the establishment of an amended primary-election system that retains — as much as possible — the independent theme of our current blanket primary.**)

With the presidential primary issue out of the way, we can get down to responsibilities at hand in the 2004 Legislative Session. My work this year, as always, will reflect Vancouver and other 49<sup>th</sup> District community issues related to our economy. **I'm talking about building quality jobs for our communities, guaranteeing quality schools for our children, and assuring quality health care for our families.**

**Thank you for reviewing my newsletter today. Please remember that I always welcome your comments, questions, and suggestions!**

**Respectfully,**

**Bill Fromhold**  
State Representative  
49<sup>th</sup> Legislative District

**January 2004**

# Representative Bill Fromhold

## Jobs: Sound economic development means constructing *quality* jobs

In my opinion, most any legislative issue should be measured by what it does *for* — and what it does *to* — the economy.

We need to ask ourselves two questions: What will it mean for workers — the people whose job it is to help make our businesses run? And what will this idea mean for the men and women who run our businesses? Quality economic development puts people to work in dependable, good-paying jobs.

The Washington Competitiveness Council is a group of business, education, civic, and labor leaders who look high and low for ways to get our state back on track. A few weeks ago, the Competitiveness Council issued its latest report. The governor, in receiving the report, highlighted the council's recommendation that we focus on **suitable funding for higher education and K-12 education if we expect to kick business-recovery into a more vigorous gear.**

### Legislative ideas on the table

Later in my report today, I write at greater length about significant education suggestions — preschool, college, and every grade level in between — from the economic council and from other quarters.

Right now, I want to review some of major business-climate recommendations to:

- **Bolster state support** — such as tax incentives, for instance — for research-and-development activities.
- **Continue work on relieving the transportation jam** — an emphasis that was renewed in the 2003 session with the transportation package that we approved.
- **Strengthen reforms already begun both in the way a state agency adopts rules and regulations, and in the way a citizen or business applies for permits.**
- **Expand our economy by offering tax credits for the construction of a manufacturing or technology facility.**
- **Offer incentives for private utilities to invest in new facilities for energy and telecommunications.**

- **Provide more leeway for local governments to use property-tax revenue to pay for infrastructure improvements they need to get their economies moving.**

I was very proud to receive an award last fall from the Columbia River Economic Development Council. The council recognized the significance of legislation I sponsored to promote the semiconductor industry.

The measure creates incentives for semiconductor businesses to put down *new* roots — or fortify *existing* roots — in Clark County. Thousands of jobs are at stake in the competition for this semiconductor-business development.

## Schools: There's simply no avoiding the fact that our future demands *quality* schools

**Education is the key — and I know there's about a million different ways to say that. But here's the deal: If we don't take time to make sure our students, teachers and schools are doing a laudable job, then we really don't have much of a future, do we?**

In the 2004 session, we'll see more attention focused on the continuum of preschool-through-college learning. **What I mean is that more and more people are embracing the concept of making the system seamless.** As they move from grade level to grade level, children and young adults shouldn't encounter the kind of rocky, bureaucratic twists and turns that can throw a student to the side of the road.

**I'm not saying that we should hold a student's hand forever. I'm just saying that unnecessary speed bumps shouldn't stop a student from earning the education that every 21<sup>st</sup>-century citizen will need.**

Public-school accountability is also a significant issue this legislative session. Other directions involve improvements in the Washington Assessment of Student Learning tests, binding arbitration to settle teacher strikes, and changes in the way funds are allocated for remedial programs.

**Schools should never be thought of as an "expense." In fact, our schools are the very best *investment* that our state and our communities can make. Put it this way: Alternatives such as poverty and prison are not an option.**

# CAPITAL LETTER: A report from your Legislature

## The future is — today!

**Our colleges and universities must take a growing role in preparing citizens for jobs *not of tomorrow — but of today!***

Worker-retraining is also a huge issue for our economy. The Legislature will continue examining the best ways to help citizens who have been thrown out of work.

I will always support strong assistance for high-performing — but financially strapped — young people who want to go to college. It's pretty simple, really: A good education *equals* a good job *equals* a good economy.

Further, our legislative work must include stronger support for training in the various health fields. Community and four-year colleges are pivotal in meeting challenges presented by these rapidly expanding fields. In fact, our mission in the allied health fields is very similar to the work I've done to secure more support for engineering-computer-science education.

I was quite honored last fall to receive an award from the Washington State Skills Centers organization. The organization commended my support for skills centers and career-technical education.

## Health care: Washington families have a right to reliable and to *quality* health care

**No one is immune to zooming costs that impact every aspect of health care.**

Average citizens have to face rising prices for health insurance and medical coverage, and average businesses have to face soaring inflation in providing health coverage for their employees. And recently in our own region, the media have reported on the serious challenges confronting the Southwest Washington Medical Center — in terms of the hospital's Medicaid reimbursement rates.

The 2004 Legislature has a full agenda of health-care issues, many of which involve these rising prices hitting every one of us. Health-care proposals this year include plans that would:

- **Eliminate premiums for children's health insurance and adult co-pays in Medicaid.**
- **Provide Basic Health Program coverage for more people.**

- **Emphasize equal access to mental-health services for all Washington citizens.**
- **Improve services in the adult-dental program.**

Last session, we approved a new state policy aimed at keeping lower-priced, equal-quality medicine available for folks whose doctors say they need it. The program is specifically designed to help citizens 50 years old and older, as well as disabled citizens.

This bipartisan prescription-drug policy was supported in the 2003 Legislature by AARP, consumer groups, business groups, and the medical association. We'll review implementation of the program in this year's legislative session.



Early last month, I was glad to read that the Southwest Washington Medical Center has extended its Medicaid-service agreement for another year.

This is wonderful news for citizens who need these services to lead a healthy life! Hospital officials, however, say they're losing a tremendous amount of money by accepting Medicaid patients.

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### Furthermore: Property-tax relief for senior citizens tops list of other important issues

As I suggested earlier in today's newsletter, our 2004 Legislative Session carries a full plate of issues beyond the topics covered above.

Here are a few of them:

- **Property taxes are threatening the survival of many Washington families — especially senior citizens who've invested a big part of their lives making our**

**communities better places in which to live.** To make sure more families get the assistance they need, we must review an expansion of the property-tax-exemption program for senior citizens.

- **We're examining ideas that involve the rate-setting practice of medical-liability insurers.** We must also look at methods *besides resorting to lawsuits* for resolving disagreements between consumers and providers. We'll consider mediation and arbitration, for example. We need to create incentives for health-care providers to *decrease medical errors and increase patient safety*.
- **In writing a supplemental budget this coming session, we've got to take into account the increase both in the number of students attending our public schools and in the number of citizens receiving public services.**

### An award from the Association of Homebuilders

I was very honored to receive an award late last year from the National Association of Homebuilders.

A Republican senator and I were named State Elected Officials of the Year by the organization. The homebuilders recognized the legislative work I've led to bring homebuilders and attorneys together on significant condominium-liability issues. Consumer-protection has been — and remains — my primary focus in this area of the law.

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